

**Chapter 52: Remote Operations**  
**Director's Memorandum on Backcountry Travel Procedures, July 10, 2006**



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
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Washington, D.C. 20240

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IN REPLY REFER TO:  
A56 (2400)

July 10, 2006

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors  
Attn: Superintendents

From: Director /s/ Steve Martin

Subject: Backcountry Travel Procedures  
**ACTION REQUIRED BY JANUARY 2007**

Backcountry travel is a critical and necessary component of National Park Service (NPS) operations and is many times conducted in some of the most rugged and difficult terrain imaginable. It is imperative that we provide our employees who travel in the backcountry with the best information, equipment, and guidance necessary to help them perform their jobs safely.

I have recently reviewed the Serious Accident Investigation Team's (SAIT) findings and recommendations relating to the death of Park Ranger Jeff Christensen. Many of these recommendations are already in place in certain NPS sites; however, I am now directing that they be implemented Servicewide.

This memorandum allows latitude to Superintendents in selecting the "best fit" procedures for their respective sites; however, they will be responsible for ensuring compliance with each section listed in this memorandum. These procedures should be captured in one document such as a standard operating procedure or backcountry operations guide by January 1, 2007, and shall relate to all employees traveling in the backcountry regardless of division, discipline, grade, or job title. Superintendents should provide necessary guidance and information to their employees in the interim.

1. Superintendents will ensure that a backcountry job hazard analysis (JHA) is conducted and that identified hazards are clearly communicated to all employees. Understanding that every danger cannot be captured, this analysis should be used to help identify potential safety issues such as high water crossings, rock-fall zones, avalanche zones, or other possible dangers associated with backcountry travel. The analysis will also identify procedures and/or equipment to control those hazards or reduce the hazardous exposure.

2. Superintendents will develop and implement a clear method to account for employees traveling in backcountry settings. This method will minimally include planned route of travel, procedures to follow when major travel deviations are made by employees off the intended route, and sufficient information to help locate the employee in the event of an emergency.
3. Superintendents will develop a backcountry communication plan which will outline requirements relating to backcountry communications. This plan should include pertinent data such as dispatching/operating procedures, radio check-in times, back-up communications options, identified radio dead spots, plans for non-responsive communications with employees, and any other pertinent procedures deemed necessary.
4. Superintendents will ensure that employees who travel in the backcountry receive appropriate training in situational awareness, personal risk management, and are aware of the basic necessities relating to backcountry travel, e.g., equipment needed, knowledge of terrain, etc. Employees will also be reminded of the requirement to immediately report injuries to their supervisor(s).

All of us share the responsibility and desire to provide the safest working environment possible for our employees. Implementation of the procedures outlined in this memorandum will help us accomplish this, but the best accident control measure will continue to be a well informed employee who has clear guidance on our expectations relating to personal safety.

Parks requiring additional guidance may contact Dan Pontbriand, Branch Chief, Emergency Services, at (202) 513-7093. A sample backcountry operations guide, backcountry JHA, and research data regarding Global Positioning Systems and Personal Locator Beacons will be posted on Inside NPS under the WASO-VRP website. Parks are encouraged to use these samples when formulating their plans.

cc: Associate Regional Directors, Operations  
Regional Chief Rangers